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Borrowing the Bible, Echoing the Qur'an: The Significance of Scriptural Acumen and Exegesis when Studying *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick*

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ABSTRACT (100-200 WORDS):

Despite their widespread socio-religious influence and prominent endurance over time, the Bible and the Qur'an lack academic precedence in required literary coursework today. As prototypes for future literary works across cultures and historical epochs, the Scriptures' absence in mainstream collegiate study is especially disappointing. This essay, therefore, examines two classic American novels – Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* – through a Scriptural lens, highlighting their similitude in character types, structure, style, and thematic content. Connecting significant narrative moments and stylistic nuances to biblical and Qur'anic text, this study exposes the importance of Scriptural acumen to a deeper and more comprehensive study of the two novels. Moreover, stressing the self-aware and "living" quality of the Bible and the Qur'an reveals the underlying, esoteric threads tying *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* to their Scriptural counterparts. By constructing these literary bridges over spatial and temporal parameters, the paper underscores the need for required coursework in Scriptural texts, so English students can fully appreciate the unique roots of the American literary canon.

Borrowing the Bible, Echoing the Qur'an: The Significance of Scriptural Acumen and Exegesis when Studying *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick*

Due to their use in a religious, and resultantly controversial, context, the Bible and the Qur'an remain ubiquitously absent in mainstream educational curricula. While more advanced courses at the collegiate level offer an opportunity for students to engage with these pieces, the general student population remains relatively ignorant of scriptural influence on literature. Regardless of their socio-religious impact, in a broader context, the Bible and the Qur'an possess an inherently textual quality that stimulates imitation throughout literary history, especially within the American canon. Although containing traditional narrative elements such as character, plot, theme, and symbolism, the Bible and the Qur'an uniquely amalgamate these features under an overarching "umbrella of text." To clarify, the Bible and the Qur'an frequently allude to their textual existence utilizing narrative tropes and shifts in tone and language to expose an intrinsically self-referential and self-aware nature. In underscoring this recognition that, as texts, the Bible and the Qur'an are able to communicate with each reader regardless of spatial and temporal constraints, these texts harbor a life force within their physical, literary presence demanding a deeper, esoteric engagement from the reader.

It is no wonder then that authors in our own national canon recreate this textual self-awareness in an extensively allegoric and deeply influential way. In fact, *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* - Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville's paradigmatic American novels - share significant, and arguably deliberate, commonalities with the two scriptural pieces, especially in their innately literary nature. While the traditional narrative elements that permeate the Bible and the Qur'an can be traced through the works of Hawthorne and Melville, it is in their usage of "the umbrella of text" that captures the reader and exposes the importance of scriptural acumen and exegesis to a thorough and comprehensive study of the two novels.

Short Stories with a Biblical Basis

Although *The Scarlet Letter* represents the literary apex of Hawthorne's allegorical presentation of biblical exegesis, prior to its publication in 1850, Hawthorne recreates specific biblical scenes and persona through his short stories: "Roger Malvin's Burial" (1832), The Wives of the Dead" (1832), and "The Minister's Black Veil" (1836).

Notwithstanding the audience's understanding of the price of sin in "Roger Malvin's Burial," especially exemplified in the untimely death of Cyrus Bourne, the narrative's overarching similitude to Genesis 22 augments this theme by reciprocally focusing on the relationship between father and son and the recompense for obedience. This particular biblical story, better known as the near sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, results in a fortified covenant between Abraham and God, who states, "... because thou hast done this thing, and not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee...And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (22:16-18). Similarly, Reuben Bourne, emotionally and physically burdened by an unfulfilled promise hears, "a voice audible only to himself, commanding him to go forth and redeem his vow" (Hawthorne 10). Unlike Abraham, though, Reuben disregards this voice until, with his son in tow years later, he finds himself inadvertently at the precipice of his father-in-law's final resting place. Realizing that "it was Heaven's intent to afford him an opportunity of expiating his sin," Reuben unintentionally kills his son- his literal blood- on this inadequate burial ground (Hawthorne 13). Although dissolving Cyrus's future, Reuben ultimately receives his long desired penance at the sacrifice of his own child. So, where Abraham willingly obeys the voice of God and receives a renewed blessing for his posterity, Reuben shuns the voice for years until the only remaining option for his atonement is his son's life. Furthermore, this biblical allusion exacerbates the consequences of Reuben's unfulfilled promise in the disillusionment of his son's destiny as, "the father of a race, the patriarch of a people, and the founder of a mighty nation yet to be" (Hawthorne

8). Like Abraham, an unwritten covenant existed in the offspring of Reuben Bourne, yet this future remains an evanescent dream sacrificed to absolve Reuben's sin of disobedience and deception.

Far less macabre in its biblical allusion, "The Wives of the Dead" recalls the sisterly bond between Ruth and Naomi in The Book of Ruth through the story's two protagonists, Mary and Margaret. Although each pair bears the grief of untimely familial death, the parallels lie in Mary's connection to Ruth and Margaret's to Naomi. In the Bible, Naomi, after the loss of her husband and sons, urges her daughters-in-law to return to their homelands in search of a new beginning; however, Ruth remains to provide succor to her destitute mother-in-law. Likewise, Mary's misfortune, Hawthorne states, "besides as earliest known, should earliest cease to interfere with her regular course of duties; accordingly, having placed the table before the fire, and arranged a frugal meal..." (Hawthorne 1). Mimicking the care and devotion Ruth shows Naomi, Mary emotionally transcends her grief in order to care for her suffering sister. Conversely, Margaret's melodramatic despair opposes Mary's benevolent entreaty as she cries, "There is no blessing left for me, neither will I ask it" (Hawthorne 1). This disparity offers a suitable comparison to Ruth's diametric opposite, Naomi. Analogous to Margaret's religious apostasy, Naomi, upon returning to her homeland, announces, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt bitterly with me" (Ruth 1:20). Akin to Ruth and Mary's steadfast spirit in the face of affliction, Naomi and Margaret both express their grief with outward disaffection, especially toward the divine. This is more than a mere story of corresponding persona, however; as The Book of Ruth upholds the persevering and obedient actions of Ruth, so Hawthorne celebrates Mary's quiet resolution over the theatrical apostatizing of Margaret and, subsequently, Naomi.

Channeling a more recognized biblical figure in "The Minister's Black Veil," Hawthorne alludes to Moses' veiling following his descent from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments in Exodus 34. Unbeknownst to Moses, though, "... the skin of his face shone while he talked with

[God]," and he retains this shining countenance much to the dismay of the Israelites (34:29-30). Consequently, "till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face" (34:33). Likewise, Mr. Hooper in "The Minister's Black Veil," willingly dons a black veil for the remainder of his life, yet for reasons never fully disclosed. Aside from this mystery, Mr. Hooper's similarities to Moses extend beyond solely the veil. In fact, Mr. Hooper's only visible feature- his mouth- is frequently described as, "a sad smile gleaming faintly from beneath the black veil, and flickered about his mouth, glimmering as he disappeared" (Hawthorne 3). Utilizing key adjectives such as, "gleam," "flicker," "glimmer," and "sad," Hawthorne not only recalls Moses' comparably shining features, but also the underlying tone behind his purpose for hiding them. Rather than celebrating Moses' supernatural radiation, the Israelites, a group frequently incurring the wrath of God through disobedience and idolatry, cower in fear from their leader. Correspondingly, the townspeople avoid and fear Mr. Hooper, though, diverting from the Exodus story, *because* he wears the veil. Whereas the Israelites fear the literal glory from God on Moses' face, subsequently requiring him to wear a veil, the Milford townspeople dread the symbolic purpose behind the veil's existence. Implicitly, this veil represents not secret sin, but concealment- a sin that hides and separates a person from the world and from God. Beneath this veil, therefore, lies the true individual: unmasked, free from shame, and luminously pure. Therefore, while the biblical allusion illuminates the reason behind Mr. Hooper's veiling, it also enhances the implications of veiling oneself, both literally and figuratively.

In the Repetitious Beginning

Like the "throng of bearded men, in sad colored garments and gray, steeple-crowned hats… assembled in front of a wooden edifice" we, as an audience, stand expectantly at the precipice of *The Scarlet Letter*'s opening (41). Anticipating some unknown and never disclosed event, the Boston community gathers at the prison's entrance; and so Hawthorne positions his reader, "on the

threshold of our narrative, which in now about to issue forth from that inauspicious portal" (42). Almost immediately, Hawthorne presents an incredibly self-aware text conscious of its ability to converse with the audience and concurrently establish an intimate relationship with us bordering on the shared authorial (notice Hawthorne labels the story "*our* narrative"). Furthermore, *The Scarlet Letter*'s realization of itself as a living text allows it to transcend spatial and temporal bounds and demand the reader's engagement with it on a deeper interpretative level.

Similar to this metatextuality, the Bible begins with that all too familiar phrase, "In the beginning…" (Genesis 1:1). Although a proper introduction to the start of the Book of Genesis (interpreted literally as the beginning), the Bible's first lines also hold textual weight on the Bible as a whole. In its very inception the Bible is cognizant of a readership, and thus draws our attention to the significance of the opening as *the* beginning to the Book, as well as the chapter.

Moreover, the two texts' foremost chapters challenge the very concept of beginnings; they are introductions to the beginning - they are anti-beginnings. It is impossible, however, to simply categorize these chapters as preludes because the subsequent chapter in each respective text acts as a reiterative beginning to the narrative storyline. Hawthorne's second chapter, for instance, opens, "The grass plot before the jail… was occupied by a pretty large number of the inhabitants of Boston; all with their eyes intently fastened on the iron-clamped oaken door" (43). Paralleling, almost exactly, the first lines of "The Prison Door," "The Market Place" denotes the true start to *The Scarlet Letter*'s tale- but what, the reader must ask, is the purpose of "The Prison Door"? The answer may be found in this double-beginning's similitude to Genesis 1 and 2. Although in Genesis 1:27 "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them," in Genesis 2:7, "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Tantamount to *The Scarlet Letter*, Genesis also supplies two analogous beginnings, and in Chapter 2, like "The Market Place," specifying the creation of an

individual being and commencing the narrative that will dominate the text's remaining plot. Genesis 2 and "The Market Place," therefore, act as concentrated versions of their partner openings creating a text that is invariably beginning; a cyclical piece that, while concluding textually, constantly refers back to its anti-beginning.

A Cyclical Reconciliation

In regard to content, "The Prison Door" assures the audience of two things integral to both the Puritanic Boston community and to the forthcoming narrative- death and crime. Echoing the early Bostonians who "recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison," so Hawthorne begins his story at the threshold of the jailhouse door (41). Consequently, we can expect *The Scarlet Letter* to begin with crime and end with death, more than likely in the very cemetery described in the inaugural chapter. In the beginning, therefore, the text refers to its own ending.

These two tropes- death and crime- also appropriately parallel the first narrative of the Bible, illustrating the disobedience and subsequent punishment of Adam, Eve, and the snake. After disobeying God and eating the forbidden fruit, each criminal is provided a curse concluding with Adam, whose punishment is eventual death. The biblical text proceeds to reconcile the sins of Adam and Eve throughout its multitudinous texts, culminating with the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament. In essence, the Bible's overarching storyline is one of reconciliation through death. Best summarized in Romans, Paul states, "For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift of grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (5:15).

Correspondingly, the action in *The Scarlet Letter*, though minimal, frequently suggests the eventual revelation and attending salvation of the text's main characters. Dimmesdale's perpetually declining health, Chillingworth's vengeful dedication, and Pearl's frequent inquiries into her

paternal roots all foreshadow the novel's climactic scaffold scene. Despite Dimmesdale's obvious similarities to Adam, his death recalls that of Jesus, especially exemplified when he states, "By bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people!" Like Jesus' crucifixion, Dimmesdale's death is one of shame and publicity, but triumph nonetheless. Through his transgression with Hester, Dimmesdale dooms his progeny, Pearl, to a life of constant conflict with the world; yet through his death and confession, "A spell was broken… and as [Pearl's] tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were a pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever to do battle with the world, but to be a woman in it" (209). Echoing the broken biblical curse encapsulated in Paul's epistle to the Romans, Hawthorne utilizes Dimmesdale's death to free Pearl from a cursed life.

Textual Traits

In a recondite, though still tangible way, Hester Prynne also embodies characteristics unique to the biblical figure, Jesus of Nazareth. Recalling the cyclical nature of biblical text, the Gospel of John begins, "In the beginning was the Word" and continues, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (1:1, 14). Here, John equates Jesus with the Word or voice of God, which spoke creation into being. In the New Testament, though, Jesus is present in a physical way, now literally, the word incarnate. Similarly, Hester Prynne and the scarlet letter are synonymous throughout the novel. From the opening when Hawthorne describes *The Scarlet Letter* as, "our narrative, which is now about to issue forth from the inauspicious portal," he alludes to Hester. Before her introduction, Hester and the text are one and the same. Likewise, Jesus is with God in Genesis during the creation of both the world contextually and the book holistically via a literary medium. Although Hawthorne merely suggests or intimates with other characters, especially Pearl, he avoids equivocating when paralleling Hester and her textual badge. In fact, aside from the letter being the most recognizable attribute of Hester by the outside world, when examining herself in a convex mirror in the

Governor's house she saw, "that the scarlet letter was represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance" (88). This physical manifestation of the literary on Hester also echoes the Book of Revelation in which, "[Jesus] had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God" (19:12-13). Not only similar in their crimson hue, but the writings present on both Jesus and Hester refer to the wearer; Hester is the scarlet letter and so it is present on her person and Jesus is the Word of God whose name is inscribed on his clothing.

Therefore, while embodying different, though paired figures from the Old Testament, Hester and Dimmesdale merge in their corresponding representations of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Significance of Conclusions

Aside from the subtle character echoes in the conclusions of either work, the captivating similitude between the Book of Revelation and *The Scarlet Letter*'s two companionate concluding chapters is the unique position of the reader in both endings. Although the biblical Book of Revelation and Hawthorne's "The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter" nominally suggest an unveiling of truth or concealed information, both pieces deliberately veil significant textual moments only from the outside reader. In "The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter" for example, Dimmesdale concludes his rousing election speech "on which the souls of the listening audience had been borne aloft, as on the swelling waves at sea," though we, the readers, never receive the text of said oratory (203). Similarly, though John, author of the Book of Revelation, is specifically commanded to write all that he sees from the angel of God, in 10:4 he states, "And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not." Although John hears the words of the thunders in the Book of Revelation and the Boston community receives the words of Dimmesdale, John and Hawthorne veil these highly significant textual moments from the outside reader.

Furthermore, the ending of each respective piece represents the cyclical metatextuality reminiscent of both text's perpetual beginning. *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, though ending with our main character's death, includes the shared gravestone of Hester and Dimmesdale, which states, "On a field, sable, the letter A, gules" (216). Concluding with the image of the scarlet "A," Hawthorne recalls the novel's introduction where his discovery of the scarlet letter incites his motivation to tell this badge's story. Although ending his novel, Hawthorne forces the reader to recall the beginning, essentially creating an eternal tale never ending nor beginning. Likewise, the Book of Revelation ends with the promise of Jesus' second coming or a continuation of the narrative. However, John specifically demands that no one take away nor add any works to the Bible (22: 18-19). Therefore, the Bible appropriately ends with Jesus, or the Word of God, while concurrently echoing Genesis where God speaks the earth into existence utilizing the Word, or Jesus. Comparable to *The Scarlet Letter*, the Bible ends with a tangible parallel to its beginning, thus also creating a cyclical and perpetual text where the outside reader is constantly referred to the self-awareness and palpable literary quality of each piece.

A Titular Engagement

In its very inception, *Moby-Dick* reveals itself as a text of duality, perspective, and choice. Prior to any narrative voice, action, or preliminary exordium, the audience receives the frontispiece to the novel- *Moby-Dick Or, The Whale*. Although seemingly redundant, this dual title signifies the beginning of an audience interaction integral to understanding the novel as a whole, as well as its Scriptural echoes. In fact, the "or" acts as a textual barrier between Moby Dick and The Whale severing any synonymy between the two and instead constructing a bridge in which the two are related, though not necessarily equivalent. Holistically, the novel also signifies a kind of osmotic, textual barrier separating Moby Dick and the Whale, implying that we must decide when to equate and when to dissociate the two tropes. Throughout the novel, Ishmael will demand our esoteric

interpretation of Moby Dick as an essence and also as an animistic whale. While Ahab monomaniacally searches for the infamous white whale, the concluding chapters contain the *Pequod*'s encounter with Moby Dick – a being invested with mystery, intelligence, and beauty. The two - the whale and Moby Dick - therefore, act as dualistic vehicles for the reader's exegetic understanding.

Similarly, the Bible and the Qur'an, in a titular sense, represent a textual self-awareness that compels its readership to directly engage with its content in specialized and definitive ways. Consider that the Bible, literally translated, is "the book," and the Qur'an, "the recitation," both of which are mediums for a narrative voice to captivate its audience in myriad ways. The book, for instance has connotations of reading, interpreting, and the physical, visual presence of words. However, recitation, while including much of the same bookish implications, has the sense of a dramatic or sensual experience for the audience. More specifically, a recitation has an audience aesthetic in which we comprehend the text by listening- an entirely different, though still essential form of textual engagement. The importance of these varying forms of textual digestion lies in their amalgamation within the pages of *Moby-Dick*. Comparable to both the density of the Bible and the Qur'an, *Moby-Dick* engages its audience by interweaving the schematics of both the literary and the dramatic, thus consistently recalling its Scriptural counterparts. Moreover, all three pieces, prior to any narrative beginning, capture the reader and provide a lens with which to understand the breadth of its multitudinous text.

Call Me Moby-Dick, No, The Whale, No, Call Me Ishmael

Aside from representing, perhaps, the most recognized quote in the American literary canon, "Call me Ishmael" further signifies this text's amazingly animate and self-aware nature. While introducing the name of our primary narrator, this demand also forces the reader to redefine the text as a whole. Recall that titularly, the text calls itself Moby-Dick and the Whale; in this opening, then,

the text now also aligns itself with Ishmael forcing the reader to perceive the text as a vacillating tri-entity incarnated to offer multiple vehicles for interpretation and interaction. Whenever we encounter the three tropes, especially in a nominal sense, the text urges us to both engage with the character or being, while also recalling the book holistically. This idea will be essential to comprehending future narrative profundities and self-referential echoes.

Furthermore, the name "Ishmael" has biblical and Qur'anic significance as an Ishmael plays a key thematic role in both scriptural texts. While the Qur'anic Ishmael holds prophetic status and aids in the reconstruction of the Ka'ba (the first building erected by Adam at the behest of God), the biblical Ishmael provides the character parallel for *Moby-Dick*. In the Book of Genesis, although Ishmael is Abraham's first son borne by the handmaid Hagar, he shares no part in the genealogy of the chosen seed culminating with the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Instead, an angel of God imparts a wholly divergent prophecy concerning the eldest of the Abrahamic line, that "he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (16:12). Essentially shunned from the tribe of Abraham and holding a part in a prophecy of hostility, loneliness, and isolation, Ishmael becomes an archetype of biblical outcasts.

Tantamount to the social ostracism experienced by the biblical Ishmael, our Ishmael frequently travels alone and sequesters himself from the outside world. Rather than sharing in the merriment of a returning whale-ship crew, for instance, Ishmael "resolves to spend the rest of the evening as a looker-on" and, later, he perambulates in seclusion about the New Bedford streets (40). Although fulfilling the role of an itinerant outcast, the Melvillian character *chooses* his isolation- and herein lies his key divergence from his biblical counterpart. When experiencing "a damp, drizzly November in [his] soul" Ishmael admits, "I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can" (27). In the ultimate form of seclusion, Ishmael willingly joins a whaling ship, which, aside

from being its own insular community detached from the terrestrial world, embraces other "Ishmaels" seeking pecuniary gain, adventure, and above all, escape. This discordant motivation between the two Ishmaels also illustrates a key theme to understanding Melville's biblically synonymous characters- they rarely embody a single biblical persona. Although the biblical Ishmael shares no part in God's covenant with Abraham, it is Melville's Ishmael who alone survives the fated wreck. While choosing his isolation and performing his nominal role as a social outcast, Ishmael, as the lone survivor of the *Pequod*, signifies a chosen designation reminiscent of his brother, Isaac.

The Stylistics of Drama and Doomsday Prophecies

Throughout the proverbial genesis of *Moby-Dick*, prophets and portents frequently adumbrate the imminent tragedy to befall the *Pequod* at the conclusion of the novel. From the painting resembling "a Cape Horner in a great hurricane…and an exasperated whale, purposing to spring clean over the craft," to the ominous epitaphs in the Whaleman's Chapel to the heralding Elijah's "ambiguous, half-hinting, half-revealing, shrouded sort of talk," Melville intensifies his foreshadowing until Ahab's speech in "The Quarter-Deck" (38, 127). Finally revealing his determination to wreak vengeance on the white whale, Ahab persuades the crew to deviate from their pecuniary voyage and enlist in his vindictive hunt. Concluding his speech with, "Death to Moby-Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby-Dick to his death," the crew, then, with lifted glasses "and to cries and maledictions against the white whale, the spirits were simultaneously quaffed down with a hiss" (206). With little narrative progression following the voyage's launch, this moment propels the *Pequod*, as well as the plot into its true purpose- to capture, both literally and figuratively, Moby-Dick. For us as readers, then, this moment indicates the first climactic moment of the novel drawing our attention to its immediate implications.

Although "The Quarter-Deck" marks a turning point for textual momentum, it is in the chapters following which hold profound and Scriptural meaning for us as readers. In fact, the four chapters immediately succeeding this narrative climax- "Sunset," "Dusk," "First Night-Watch," and "Midnight, Forecastle" recall Qur'anic style, tone, and content essential for understanding the connotations of these strangely transcendent chapters. "Sunset," "Dusk," and "First Night-Watch," for instance, textualize the dramatic soliloquies of Ahab, Starbuck, and Stubb, while "Midnight, Forecastle" reads like a theatric script, complete with stage directions and cues. In either case, the audience plays a significant role in the text as, theoretically, the dramatic genre lends its existence to the presence of an audience. Similarly, the Qur'an, as "the recitation," relies heavily on the presence and direct engagement with an outside audience as a unique, though tangible form of the dramatic genre. Consequently, *Moby-Dick* and the Qur'an have specific structures utilized to both actively engage the audience and emphasize this text's ability to transcend the physical and temporal bounds of the physical narrative.

Furthermore, the apocalyptic chapters of the Qur'an, specifically chapters 81 through 84, recall the stylistics of the drama, while simultaneously echoing the thematic doom permeating the aforementioned Melvillian chapters. Chapter 81, or "The Darkening," begins by detailing the signs and occurrences characterizing the apocalypse in a conventional narrative progression. However, verse 15 denotes a shift in voice and tone reminiscent of the theatric stating, "No! I swear by the slinkers, the runners, the sinkers…" (15-16). Here, the text transforms its narrative structure into a direct address to an outside audience. The "No!" moreover, symbolizes the speaker's reaction to the doubt or possible skepticism of an outside responder, in this case, the audience. Tantamount to our position as listeners and interpreters in *Moby-Dick*, we perform a similar role in this Qur'anic chapter- we are tools for the text to legitimize its purport. Continuing in the dramatic style, the subsequent chapters contain emotional apostrophes such as, "O Man! What deceived thee as to thy

generous Lord," and "O Man! Thou art labouring unto thy Lord laboriously," which parallel the apostrophic lamentations of Starbuck in his soliloquy concluding with "Oh life! 'tis now that I do feel the latent horror in thee..." (82:6, 84:6, Melville 210). In each respective apostrophe, the audience is allowed access to a specific insight of the speaker and can thus glean private information necessary to understanding the character or text's motivations and actions. Specifically in regard to style, during apostrophes or soliloquies, the audience plays a necessary role as these theatric forms utilize the verbal as vehicles to communicate usually recondite information.

Additionally, these soliloquies share a specific and significant thematic corollary with the Qur'an's apocalyptic chapters necessary to understanding the implications of Ahab's morally skewed monomania. In the introductions of "The Darkening" and "The Splitting," the text illustrates the cosmic, celestial, and terrestrial precursors to "the Day of Doom." However, these indications form a kind of logical syllogism, each verse beginning with "when..." followed by a specific occurrence. This catalog, in both chapters, then ends with "then a soul shall know what it has produced/ its works the former and the latter" (81:14, 83:5). In either introduction, the text begins with the visual, physical, and large-scale manifestations of the apocalypse and concludes with the individual, intimate, and personal implications of these supernatural catastrophes. Likewise, *Moby-Dick*'s initial climactic moment begins with the crew's oath to hunt the White Whale and culminates with the private, concealed thoughts of Ahab, Starbuck, and Stubb regarding the future ramifications of this vindictive chase to the individual.

Addressing Future Narrative Profundities

Following these exciting and dramatic chapters, "Moby Dick" recalls one of the vacillating titular associations previously discussed and thus represents a microcosm of the novel as a whole. Beginning with "I, Ishmael" this chapter directly echoes the text's opening lines, "Call me Ishmael," which demands the reader to analyze "Moby Dick's" content in regard to *Moby-Dick*, the

novel (220, 27). Additionally, this chapter marks another instance of this text's very animate ability to manipulate and transform itself in order to transcend the limited bounds of traditional plot progression. When it concludes with, "For one I gave myself up to the abandonment of the time and the place; but while yet all a-rush to encounter the whale, could see naught in that brute but the deadliest ill," we experience an esoteric textual moment where both a character and the text abandon the spatial and temporal bounds of narrative to reveal this chapter's animate and holistic nature (229). Furthermore, the title represents a unique incarnation of a titular character as the text- both in its entirety and in this short episode.

Scripturally, this incarnation of the textual and self-referential awareness biblically parallels the Gospel of John and Revelation, while Qur'anically recalling chapter 55, or, "The All-Merciful." In the former biblical book, the character Jesus represents the whole of biblical text - John describes him as "the Word made flesh" (1:14). Although a seemingly simple statement, the implications of this designation are layered and far-reaching. In the personhood of Jesus, the Bible becomes both character and text. When interpreting Jesus' actions, speeches, and interactions, therefore, we can also assume the Bible itself is "doing" these things. Additionally, when in Revelation Jesus asserts, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end," Jesus defines himself in both lexical and structural terms (1:8). As "the Word," Jesus is the beginning and the end of biblical text down to its final letter. Amalgamating these manifold identities, then, Jesus, like Moby Dick, becomes the text, both contextually and holistically.

Similarly, "The All-Merciful," represents a microcosm of the text and the ubiquity of the character, The All-Merciful. Beginning prior to the creation of man, this chapter originates with the All-Merciful "who has taught the Koran," and afterwards "He created man" (55:1-2). Again, a text, in this case the very text we are reading, precedes creation and provides an incarnation of an organic entity. The All-Merciful teaches the Qur'an (or Koran) giving it an animate and self-aware nature,

which will provide an "Explanation" to man regarding the final days- detailed in verses 31 and following. Although not a specific character, per se, this chapter signifies, like *Moby- Dick*, the ability of narrative to exist in its textual form, but also its ability to eclipse those spatial and temporal bounds and exist perpetually.

Evolving Chapters, Evolving Text

In fact, stylistically and structurally, the Qur'an defies linear narrative trajectory, unfolding instead through wildly episodic chapters and with a vacillating voice constantly altering its tone and purpose. This strange, fragmented, nonlinear structure, like its animate self-awareness, allows the Qur'an to supersede the confines of text and engage with the reader regardless of spatial and temporal parameters. In Chapter 96, or "The Blood-Clot," for instance, the narrator begins with a brusque imperative – "Recite" – followed by a simple homage to the divine (96:1). Later, however, the object of the speaker's message suddenly shifts as the narrator declares, "No indeed: surely Man waxes insolent/ for he thinks himself sufficient" (96:6-7). Although the first line addresses a concrete reader, the succeeding lines take on a third person omniscient narrative voice speaking *of* an abstract concept ("Man") to a non-specific audience. In the immediately accompanying chapter, though, the voice shifts again, speaking directly to a corporeal "thee" and "thou." This oscillation in both voice and audience denotes a text of an unedited quality that vacillates constantly and without warning because its plot is propelled by constant growth. Moreover, as a text of fixed forward progression, the Qur'an's episodic verses and fragmented chapters represent a living work. Consequently, this forces us to read the Qur'an as we might "read" a person verbally relating something of significant importance. A speaker cannot revise his/her words but must continue narrating, editing only by referring to a past point and expounding upon it- and so it is with the Qur'an. Additionally, this quality imbues the Qur'an with a constantly evolving nature essential to understanding *Moby-Dick*'s comparable use of this uniquely organic narrative style.

Although *Moby-Dick* is, overall, Ishmael's recollection of his first whaling voyage, it is also an evolving text constantly fluctuating between Ishmael's whaling memoirs and his "digressional" chapters. These digressions represent an interruption in the narrative storyline and occupy the present time of Ishmael's writing, allowing him to, like the Qur'an, create a living piece. This ability is especially apparent in the opening lines of Chapters LXII and LXIII, or "The Dart" and "The Crotch." Pausing his narrative recollection, "The Dart" begins, "A word concerning an incident in the last chapter" (340). While seemingly a simple explanation regarding an apparatus of the whaling ship, this chapter, and especially this line, reveal the unedited quality of *Moby-Dick*. Rather than clarifying the dart's purpose upon its mention in "Stubb Kills a Whale," Ishmael sets aside an entire chapter after the aforementioned account is complete. Like the speaker of the Qur'an, Ishmael imparts a voice of fixed forward progression, only pausing to add text, not to edit nor omit. Resultantly, *Moby-Dick* resembles a living, growing entity nourished and cultivated by words, chapters, and literary tropes.

This point is further emphasized in "The Crotch," which begins, "Out of the trunk, the branches grow; out of them the twigs. So, in productive subjects, grow the chapters" (342). Literally equating this text to an organic object, Ishmael not only underscores his novel's living quality, but also its "productive" quality. More than merely a text of uninhibited and sporadic growth, *Moby-Dick* is a text of purposeful creation that, via words, expands on itself for the benefit of the reader. Therefore, tantamount to the Qur'an, *Moby-Dick* exists and, more importantly, grows for its audience. These vacillations between Ishmael's recollections and his explanatory chapters, then, reveal this novel's raw, unrefined constitution, thus saturating the text with the ability to evolve, grow, and exist beyond its mere textual presence. Thus, similar to the Qur'an, *Moby-Dick* acts as a living memory given life through the written word. The implications of this, however, are better

understood when examining *Moby-Dick* through the lens, "the science of the literary as a tool for salvation."

The Science of the Literary as a Tool for Salvation

Often, as a culture, we are apt to separate the branches of knowledge labeled "art" and "science," defining their relationship using a discourse of dichotomy, rather than of mutual dependency. While attributing to art (a branch that traditionally includes literary study) the capricious, enigmatic nature of the subjective, we place science in the pragmatic, realistic realm of the objective. In these categorical definitions exists a clear hierarchy in which scientific discovery, due to its verifiable and empirical data, trumps literary study's abstract, individualized conclusions. However, when examining *Moby-Dick* through a lens entitled "the science of the literary as a tool for salvation," it becomes necessary to more seriously consider the implications and correlations of the motifs "science" and "the literary." For instance, after removing the trappings of methodology and objectivism, science, in its most basic form, becomes the search for truth; and the science of the literary, therefore, becomes the search for truth through the process of writing. Now, as *Moby-Dick* is a novel so heavily imbued with a subjective "I" speaking to a subjective "you," the reader can cogently trace the novel's "science of the literary" directly from its authorial source, Ishmael.

Throughout *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael undertakes this search for truth in two distinct forms: through his scrupulous and painstaking descriptions of the anatomic whale and through an allegorical and profound retelling of the *Pequod*'s voyage to capture Moby Dick. The first form manifests in the digressional chapters, or those that occupy the present time of Ishmael's writing. These chapters serve as legal, defensible evidence averring the veracity both of his observations concerning the whale and of the tragic, though fantastic demise of the *Pequod*. When considering the sperm whale's capacity to use his head as an object of force and destruction in the chapter entitled "The Battering-Ram," for example, Ishmael states, "Here is a vital point; for you must

either satisfactorily settle this matter with yourself, or forever remain an infidel as to one of the most appalling, but not the less true events, perhaps anywhere to be found in all recorded history" (395). Referring to the scene in which Moby Dick, using his forehead as a battering ram, destroys the *Pequod*, Ishmael delineates all possible evidence for this feat and then demands us, as readers, to accept its authenticity. In fact, the many chapters that meticulously describe the whale's varied anatomic aspects involve Ishmael asserting a voice of credibility steeped in empirical knowledge, while concurrently connecting the respective cetological feat he discusses to Moby Dick's actions at the conclusion of the novel. Ishmael's search for truth using science's most banal form – incontrovertible evidence – is, therefore, completed *after* the narrative events to bolster the authenticity of his account. This allows us to read *Moby-Dick* as a text of complete truthfulness and forces us to accept the veracity of the story's concluding episode.

The second, and by far the most important, use of "the science of the literary" in *Moby-Dick*, aside from occurring through the narrative retelling of the *Pequod*'s voyage, represents Ishmael's search for truth specifically as a tool for salvation. We must first examine the Scriptural precedence of this lens, however, in order to fully comprehend its significance to *Moby-Dick*.

Biblically, the theme of salvation, while sporadically and abstrusely occurring in the Old Testament, forcefully arrives through the life and death of a human vehicle - Jesus of Nazareth - in the Greek New Testament. Ordained since the introduction of sin, and subsequently death, through the temptation and disobedience of Adam, Jesus' human mortality annuls death itself and provides mankind with eternal spiritual life. Following Adam's initial transgression in Genesis, the Hebrew prophets frequently predict God's eventual reconcilement with mankind through the death of one man - Jesus. Although recondite, Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, summarizes this point beautifully, "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (5:17).

Essentially, God uses Jesus as a medium for mankind's rescue from death, or, more appropriately, as a tool for salvation and the entirety of biblical text culminates with this point.

Furthermore and as previously discussed, The Gospel of John designates Jesus as the Word of God made flesh, but later in this Gospel, John also recalls that Jesus states, "I am the way, the truth and the life…" (1:1, 14:6). These absolute and unequivocal titles do not mean that Jesus represents the Word, or the truth, or even life; but that he *is* the Word, *is* the truth, and *is* life. As a literary work, then, the Bible describes the search for truth (Jesus) through a collection of writings (also Jesus) culminating with the human personification of God's tool for salvation (again, Jesus). Although convoluted and esoterically layered, the basic premise of the Bible's utilization of "the science of the literary as a tool for salvation," equates to a deep synonymy between the presence of the written word and eternal life, which ultimately exists in the being of a single character.

Additionally, the Qur'an also applies "the science of the literary as a tool for salvation," though with a slightly nuanced approach compared to its biblical counterpart. Rather than encompassing this idea in a person or character, the text itself is the literary incarnation of eternal life for humanity. However, the terms in which the Qur'an describes itself differ from that of the Bible, but will aid in a full comprehension of *Moby-Dick*'s use of this lens to be discussed later. In Chapter 53, or "The Star," the Qur'an distinguishes itself as "naught but a revelation revealed," and later, in Chapter 81, or "The Darkening," as "naught but a Reminder" (53:4, 81:27). While the former epithet suggests truth, but deeper than truth – "revealed" truth, or a truth that one has purposefully passed or given to another, the latter implies that this text is simply an echo or memory of something more substantial. The importance of these designations lies in the Qur'an's recollection of its own creation in "The All-Merciful," where it states, "The All-Merciful has taught the Koran. He created Man/ and He has taught him the Explanation" (55:1-3). Because God first

teaches the Qur'an, then passes the explanation of the Qur'an to men, the Qur'an becomes both the truth of God *and* an echo of this literary creation.

So, foremost, as this text is the truth, the process of reading the Qur'an becomes the search for truth, or "the science of the literary." Mentioned in "Evolving Chapters, Evolving Text," is the Qur'an's organic quality emphasized by its ability to grow through added text and vacillations in voice and theme. Therefore, in reading the Qur'an, the audience embarks on a journey with the text in its own attempt to expose its "revelation revealed." Furthermore, as "naught but a reminder," the Qur'an also becomes a tool for salvation, both for the audience and itself. Delineating its content as a reminder of God's truth allows the Qur'an to ensure its own salvation in its physical manifestation via the literary. Without its textual existence, the Qur'an would not exist at all – it is inherently and solely dependent on words both for its growth and its survival. Additionally, as a written work, the Qur'an is also dependent on an audience that can read and understand its esoteric text. Consequently, the search for truth through the process of writing and, thus, its inherent need for a readership becomes the Qur'an's tool for salvation - and so it is with *Moby-Dick*.

Above all things, *Moby-Dick*, like the Qur'an, is a living memory given eternal life through the literary; however, tantamount to the Bible, *Moby-Dick* also encompasses this idea within a single character, Ishmael. The concluding "Epilogue," for instance, provides substantial support for such a reading. Opening this chapter with a biblical quotation from the Book of Job - "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee" – Ishmael stresses the singularity, and more importantly, the purpose of his survival – to tell you his tale (1:15-19). Because Ishmael is the *Pequod*'s sole survivor, he is also the only being able to relate its tragic demise. This quotation, therefore, suggests that Ishmael survives only because he must tell this story, and to a specifically intimate readership, or "thee." Arguably, then, the individual reader of *Moby-Dick* exists to grant this novel meaning and purpose, thus adding significant weight to the novel's function as a tool for salvation.

First, as previously discussed, *Moby-Dick* is a memory, a written account of Ishmael's inaugural experience on a whaling ship told mainly from the perspective of Ishmael. Echoing the Qur'anic notion, then, that the text is "naught but a reminder" emphasizes the veracity of *Moby-Dick* (as Ishmael, only, can attest to its authenticity and does on numerous occasions), as well as its existence as a living memory, given life through the process of writing by an organic entity (Ishmael). By relating this tale through writing, then, Ishmael provides both his narrative and his voice a physical, relational presence in the form of text and an abstract presence in its impact on the individual reader, granting *Moby-Dick* a perpetual and eternal life force. Recalling the Bible, as well, Ishmael mirrors Jesus of Nazareth's all encompassing textual identity as both the text itself and the resultant perpetual impact this existence has on the reader and the story.

We cannot, however, discredit the contextual evidence suggesting that the narrative itself is Ishmael's personal "science of the literary." In his introductory chapter, "Loomings," Ishmael outlines the motivations that compelled him to join the whaling voyage, in the end concluding, "...in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and, midmost of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air" (32). More than a mere escape from the inanities of the terrestrial world, Ishmael's whaling voyage is an intimate and personally significant journey to find a specific, though obscure, entity ("one grand hooded phantom"). In a biblical sense, the similarities between God, Jesus, and Moby Dick cannot be ignored. From the comparison to the whale and God revealing himself to Moses in "The Tail," to the opposing poetics used to describe Moby Dick in "The Chase – First Day" and Jesus in Revelation 1, Ishmael draws obvious connections to the mysteries shrouding the biblically divine figures and the white whale. So, Ishmael's whaling voyage, especially to find the one enigmatic white phantom, ultimately becomes a search, quite literally, for truth (or God/Jesus). It is also important to note that we, as Ishmael's audience, join in

his pursuit *because* Ishmael writes this story. His search for truth, then, becomes ours, and his salvation at the conclusion of the novel also becomes our salvation.

Ultimately, this lens – "the science of the literary as a tool for salvation" – amounts to a deep-seated correlation between the tangible and purposeful presence of text and the written word's ability to provide physical and eternal life to a narrative. It is important to recognize that this lens emphasizes the enduring nature of literature, especially literature that has a purpose which transcends the caprices of time and change. In essence, the Scriptures and *Moby-Dick* have just that. Through allegoric and profound narratives that relate man's constant search, both internally and externally, for life's deeper meaning or truth, these pieces consistently endure the test of time exposing their lasting impact on humanity. Furthermore, these pieces blur the lines separating "science" and "literature" revealing their dependency on one another, rather than their mutual exclusivity. While scientific discovery continues to hold more value than literature's parabolic representations, this lens exposes science's dependence on text and the literary, as well as literature's perpetuity resulting from its underlying scientific purpose.

A Candid Conclusion

Utilizing a scriptural lens, therefore, exposes the underlying textual and esoteric significance of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville's works. When considering the character parallels, structural echoes, and deeply symbolic similarities, the vital messages of *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* coincide in a way that cannot be fully understood or interpreted without their scriptural counterparts in mind. To fully appreciate Ishmael's digressions and narrative purpose, for example, we must recall his synonymy to the biblical expatriate. A keen discernment of Jesus of Nazareth's position in the Bible exposes Hester's deeply textual bond to the scarlet letter- a bond that surpasses the trappings of the physical narrative. Similarly, the structure and themes of the Qur'an help to reconcile the vacillating narrative voice and fluctuating plot of *Moby-Dick*. And enveloping the

myriad narrative correlations is the "umbrella of text," in which each piece possesses an animate, self-aware nature able to transcend its physical existence as literature to engage with us as contemporary readers.

Granted that when approaching works with the corresponding density and depth of the Bible and the Qur'an, one is bound to find comparable material in nearly any literary piece. Nevertheless, whether the analogies are deliberate or coincidental, the myriad similarities reveal the importance of scriptural acumen and exegesis when studying not only two quintessentially American novels, but to a comprehensive analysis of any influential and enduring literary work. In fact, the Bible and the Qur'an represent literature that continues to withstand the test of time and criticism and whether this is attributed to their value in a religious context is irrelevant. It is the textual life force of the Scriptures that has spurred imitation throughout history, most notably within our national canon, and these multitudinous similarities beg for study, interpretation, and most of all, appreciation.

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